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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4675
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2923
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000055

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR AND SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [EPET](#) [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN/TURKMENISTAN: POLISH AMBASSADOR'S PERSPECTIVE
ON IRAN IN TURKMENISTAN

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons: 1.4(B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Poland's Ambassador to Turkmenistan reports that Iran and Turkmenistan have not agreed on a price for natural gas sales to Iran and are waiting until Turkmenistan and Russia reach a similar agreement. He said that Iran not only hopes to gain a foothold in Turkmenistan's energy sector, but also to expand its cultural influence among the ethnic Shia population in the country through language courses and scholarships. END SUMMARY.

IRAN HOPING FOR GREATER PRESENCE IN TURKMENISTAN

¶2. (C) Masiej Lang, the Polish Ambassador to Turkmenistan, told Iran Watcher January 13 that even though Turkmenistan and Iran have agreed on a "price formula" for the sale of Turkmen gas to Iran, the exact price has still not been specified because Turkmenistan is waiting to agree on a price with Russia. He said that the price Iran is charged will be cheaper than the price for Russia, somewhere between USD 150 and USD 170 per 1000 cubic meters.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Lang said that Iran "really wants to be present" in Turkmenistan, and not just in the area of energy investment and development, but also to enhance its cultural presence and influence in the country. He said that during the discussions between the two countries' oil ministers prior to the agreement that was reached earlier this month, the Iranians requested to be given full rights, "just like the Chinese enjoy," to explore, produce and transport gas to Iran from onshore deposits in Turkmenistan. Noting that there is little likelihood that the Turkmen would agree to giving Iran anything more than a service contract, he said that Turkmenistan is under increasing pressure from outside to allow foreign companies in to develop their gas fields, as they simply do not have the expertise to do it themselves. Iran, in turn, relies heavily on Turkmen gas to provide energy to the northern areas of the country, particularly as it lacks the internal infrastructure to distribute its own gas internally.

REACHING OUT TO TURKMENISTAN'S SHIA

¶4. (C) Ambassador Lang, who speaks fluent Farsi and meets regularly with the Iranian Ambassador, said that Iran's "long-term strategy" in Turkmenistan goes beyond its desire to invest in the energy sector. Through its Farsi language program at the Iranian Cultural Center, which has several

hundred students, Iran is using "soft power influence" to attract members of Turkmenistan's Shia minority, most of whom are the descendants of ethnic Azeris and Persians who migrated from Iran in the last 100 years. The young people who enrolled in the courses, he said (even some members of the Bahai faith), want to learn more about the language and culture of their grandparents. After the break-up of the USSR, people all over the region have been searching for a new cultural identity, and often look for it in their own roots. He said that the exact number of Muslims in Turkmenistan who identify themselves as Shia is not known. Only Sunni Islam enjoys official recognition by the government, although there are several Shia mosques. (NOTE: A Turkmen national who is also a Farsi speaker told us that he recently contacted the Cultural Center seeking assistance with a difficult Farsi passage that he was translating to English. The Iranian instructor with whom he spoke probed him about his interest in Farsi and his family's background and whether he was also of Iranian origin. END NOTE.)

15. (C) NOTE: Ambassador Lang learned Persian (Dari) as a child in Poland living in an area where Afghan families and professionals undergoing training in Poland resided. He emphasized that members of the Iranian mission in Ashgabat are generally not open to socializing with other diplomats, but that it is his knowledge of Farsi that has allowed him to get to know some well, including Iran's Ambassador, Mohammad-Reza Forqani. END NOTE.

16. (C) COMMENT: Our interlocutor has a unique perspective on Iran's position and activities in Turkmenistan. His

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experience is yet another reminder of the value for diplomats of speaking a foreign language well. END COMMENT.
MILES